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ABSTRACT

A description of the Parent University program of the San Rafael (California) City Schools is presented. The Parent University is described as a 1-day event in which parents are offered a variety of seminars and workshops on topics in education and parenting. Materials included in this document are: (1) an overview of the second annual Parent University which was held in 1983; (2) a description of the previous year's event (the first Parent University in San Rafael) including information on how the program was developed and reactions from participants; (3) an outline on how to organize a Parent University; (4) a news release announcing the 1983 Parent University; and (5) a local newspaper article announcing the 1982 Parent University. This document was selected by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Task Force on Public Confidence as descriptive of a promising practice or exemplary project worthy of highlighting for the California educational community. (DC)

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OUTSTANDING PROGRAM DESCRIPTION FORM

Name of School, District or Agency: Coleman Elementary School — Grade Levels: K-5

Address: 140 Rafael Drive, San Rafael, CA 94901 — Telephone: (415) 457-1894

City: _____ — State: _____ Zip: _____

Name of Contact Person: Hoyt S. Howlett — ACSA Region: 4

Name of Course, Program, Project or Policy: Parent University

Date of Operation of Program or Project: Saturday, October 29, 1983

In 300 words or less please describe your program specifically enough for others to follow. Please include your program's
(1) primary purpose (how it benefits students)
(2) participants (grade levels of students, professional staff, community persons, etc)
(3) evaluation data (if available)

On Saturday, October 29, 1983, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., San Rafael City Schools will present Parent University.

Parent University is conducted on the campus at San Rafael High School. This educational experience for parents offers an opportunity to increase understanding of their children and the educational process. Keynote speaker is Dr. Nancy Marley, Superintendent of San Rafael City Schools.

Parents may hear Dr. Marley and select three seminar/workshops from over 20, which are taught by a variety of educators from Marin County. "We are trying to offer an experience not normally available to parents," reports Gallinas School Principal Diane Janicula who is serving as Dean of Parent University. "This is the second annual experience for San Rafael Schools. Last year was highly successful." Subjects include helping a child learn to read, developing good study habits, computers in the classroom, finding scholarships, the effect of T.V. on learning, and good discipline practices.

Cost for parents is $3.00 per person or $5.00 per family. Child care is provided and donations are accepted. Parents are asked to pre-register at any San Rafael school. All materials are provided free of charge.

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NAME H. S. Howlett — DATE 12-20-83

Enclose supporting or descriptive materials and return to ACSA Public Confidence Task Force, Public Relations Department, 1517 L Street, Sacramento, CA 95814.

RING THE BELL

PARENT UNIVERSITY IS IN SESSION

The first light of morning crept through the fog as the sun showed a dim glow in the sky on this cool November morning in San Rafael, California. Marin County was not yet awake. The still damp calm that hung over the San Rafael High School campus was broken only by the soft wail of a distant foghorn at the entrance of the canal beside the school.

A car turned into the school parking lot--then another. A trickle of cars became a stream and soon the high school campus was a beehive of activity. By 8:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning, 227 parents had come to school to learn more about kids! Joining them were representatives of numerous community groups and personnel from seven other school districts. Parent University was in session.

While talk of declining confidence in schools, lack of money to operate, teachers who are burned out and don't care and disinterested parents characterize publicity about education today, San Rafael has managed to turn things around. Furthermore, 34 teachers, administrators and community members have given their time to help. A powerful coalition of people who care about kids has demonstrated that there is no more important responsibility than that of being a parent and there is no area in which more help is needed and less help given than in raising children.

The idea of parents going back to school to improve their parenting skills isn't a new one. Indeed, the parent university concept was adopted from Lancaster School District in Southern California. (THRUST, February, 1982) But certainly the ultimate degree of community cooperation was reached among students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members with this unusual opportunity for learning in Marin County.

Starting months earlier with the selection of "Dean" Diane Janicula, a San Rafael elementary school principal, a committee was formed to oversee the development of this educational endeavor. With the strong support of Superintendent

of Schools, Carl Couch and the school board, our school staffs, principals, parent groups and community members were asked what kind of courses parents needed, wanted, and might attend. PTA immediately embraced the idea. Suggestions were quick to come. "We want to understand teenagers." "What about computers in the classroom?" "How about stress in kids?" "Tell us about the effect of food on learning--television--motivation--learning disabilities." "How do you get a child ready for school?" "Can I help my child learn to read?" "How do you get kids to do what you want them to?" "Can a single-parent effectively raise children today?"

It seemed like there was no end to the suggestions for courses. The parent curriculum began to take shape. "One of our goals is to increase parents' involvement in their child's education," Dean Janicula said, "Also, the University will highlight talent in our schools. We're going to try to give parents something not normally available to them."

It was decided that parents would have a choice of three workshops, each an hour in length during the morning. To kick the program off, a stimulating keynote speaker was a must. Dr. David Tansey, Superintendent of Schools in Berkeley and a professional magician was the unanamous choice for the job.

Keeping the cost within everyone's reach was also a goal. The tuition was set at $2.00 per person or $3.00 per couple. Child care would be available on a donation basis.

By November 20th, each committee had prepared well. In spite of the feature story in the major newspaper appearing a week late (the education writer became a father and a paternity leave pre-empted the Parent University story) the media coverage was good. The three local papers all carried features and local radio and television provided generous public service time.

Each parent was given an attractive packet of materials including a campus map, course selections, general information, a brochure entitled

"52 ways to help your child learn" and to top it off a beautiful diploma to attest to attendance at Parent University.

Following registration and coffee, Dr. Tansey's address, "There's a Pony in There Somewhere" set the mood of optimism for parents returning to school. Perhaps the greatest frustration during the day was the lack of time to attend as many good seminars as were offered since there was time for each person to attend only three and over twenty were offered.

How can the success of Parent University be measured? From the point of view of the committee of principals, teachers and parents who planned and carried out the event, success was obvious. Every member of the committee, including Dean Dian Janicula, echoed the sentiment, "I want to help again next year!" Each person learned so much and felt so positive that at least one more year's tenure on the committee of Parent University was assured. Next year's date was immediately set.

From the point of view of the presenters, the same feeling prevailed. "We know how to do it even better now. Let's do it again!" This was the attitude from educational experts who spent time preparing, gave up a Saturday and volunteered their services to help parents learn more about their kids!

Total success? Not quite. One area which we felt was very important caused us much consternation. Because of a growing number of Latino and Southeast Asian students in our schools, we felt it was important to organize a program specifically for the foreign-born parents who were new to our country and to our schools. Bilingual Instructional Assistant, Dolores Dubbs and parent Sue Scott spent days preparing a program to acquaint newcomers with an American educational system. Translation in Southeast Asian and Hispanic languages was provided. The turnout, however, was disappointing! This was an area which we didn't fully understand in spite of all the work. Many of the parents we hoped to work with didn't fully understand our purpose. Many had limited schooling themselves and

communication was lacking. We do know that next time we will make our appeal in a different way, being more direct but informal through other parents and community members. Our lack of success only spurred-on those involved.

Probably the most important attitude was that of participants. We concur with Lancaster's Charles Gastineau who wrote in THRUST, "By involving the parents in a day designed specifically to meet their information needs, we're also gaining their continuing support for and understanding of the process of educating their children." Most exciting were the written evaluations. 100% of the parents reported that a "Very Good" or "Excellent" attitude characterized their experience. 97% rated the presentations just as highly. Typical written comments included, "Terrific idea", "Great wonderful opportunity", "Please continue this excellent program", "I'll be back! Can't wait for next year.", "Would like to have taken more." An appreciative mother wrote, "This morning was a total education for me. Getting together with other parents makes me see that we all have problems and we can talk about them and teach each other. Thank you for helping me and giving your time. See you next year." One of the most poignant comments was made by a parent with two children in San Rafael Schools. Valerie Houlihan who attended with her husband wrote, "As a result of my experience, I've concluded that nurturing comes naturally but parenting requires some learning."

San Rafael's Parent University has opened its doors to help parents learn.

(SIDEBAR)

HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR OWN PARENT UNIVERSITY

SELECT - Parent University Committee carefully and include:
- Administrators
- Teachers
- Parents
- Community

SURVEY - your community so that you provide for their needs. Consider input from:
- PTA and School Site Council
- School staffs
- Administrative group
- Parents and community at large
- Students

PLAN - well in advance. Printing takes times as does distribution of notices, press releases, etc. Consider committees to handle:
- Publicity, notices, graphics, etc.
- Registration
- Facilities
- Finance

PRE-REGISTER - as much as possible since this will help you plan the number of sessions. Send registration materials to:
- District office
- Each school
- PTA officers
- Pre-school
- Key businesses in community

GUIDELINES - for presenters are important since time limits and content should be as represented. Provide:
- General outline
- Map of facilities
- Badge or name tag
- All publicity materials
- Xerox or duplicating service

CHILD CARE - can make a difference in attendance. Groups which may help for reasonable costs or donations:
- Youth organizations
- School clubs
- Head Start
- Child Care Agencies
- PTA

RECOGNIZE - people who make your Parent University a success. Don't forget:
- Your committee
- Presenters
- Guest speakers
- Press or media people

EVALUATE - carefully because future success can depend on good feedback. Survey:
- Participants
- Presenters
- Committee

For complete details or guidelines write to: Parent University, San Rafael City Schools, 225 Woodland Avenue, San Rafael, CA 94901.

PARENT UNIVERSITY

NEWS RELEASE

Released to: Independent Journal, Marin Suburban Newspapers, Sun, Chronicle, Examiner, Novato Advance, EDCAL

Release date: Immediate

Contact: Bud Howlett
457-1884

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San Rafael City Schools
225 Woodland Avenue San Rafael, CA 94901 415-456-0150

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'Parent University' to debut in Marin

By Ed Bernstein
Of the IJ staff

They're trying to work magic in San Rafael.

"They" are San Rafael school officials, and — with the help of a real magician — they're hoping to send Marin parents back to school.

It's a special school, where you earn your diploma in a day, and the subject you study is school itself.

"Parent University" is the name of the one-day program Saturday at San Rafael High School, and organizers hope it will be an annual event.

The goal's not surprising: To broaden parents' understanding of children, "educational processes" and the San Rafael school system. Organizers stress all Marin parents are welcome.

But if the program's goal is no surprise, its inventive methods may be. They're certainly attention-getters.

The keynote speaker, Berkeley educator David Tansey, also happens to be a professional magician — a skill parents can expect him to use in his presentation.

The 20 available "courses" are creative too, covering such subjects as "effects of TV on learning," "creative financing for college" and "successful single parenting."

There's no shortage of optimism either: One course covers "how to get your child to do what you want."

Interpreters will be on hand, too. One of the schools' challenges with students, and therefore an important goal of any program for parents, is dealing with an enormous influx of foreign-born residents from a variety of countries, including Mexico, El Salvador and Southeast Asia.

See Parents, page A6

Parents

From page A1

Parents may sign up for any three classes, each of which runs 55 minutes — purposely resembling a university class.

What the curriculum lacks in longevity — it begins at 8:45 a.m. and ends in the afternoon — it makes up for in variety. Some more examples of classes:

- "Causes of stress in students."
- "Food and additives: Their effects on learning and behavior."
- "Computers: The future is now for your children."
- "How is a student prepared for the scholastic aptitude test?"
- "Praise as motivation — does it really work?"

It's only the second such program in the state, according to Bud Howlett, principal at Coleman School in San Rafael and one of the program's organizers.

It's the brainchild of officials of the Lancaster School District in Southern California, and they'll be on hand Saturday to see it in action in Marin.

The "dean" of Marin's Parent University is Diane Janicula, who also happens to be principal at Las Gallinas School. Howlett credits her with bringing the idea to Marin after she learned of the Lancaster program.

"We are trying to offer an experience not normally available to parents," Ms. Janicula said.

In Lancaster, the program's been offered for two years, with great success.

Marin educators have high hopes, too — despite a conflict with Saturday's Cal-Stanford football game. Howlett expects about 400 parents to show up Saturday, and many more can be accommodated. He's already figuring it will be repeated next year.

Invitations to register for the program have been sent to all parents in the San Rafael elementary and high school districts, as well as the Dixie district. Howlett, however, says the program should be helpful to any Marin parent.

Parents can register by contacting any San Rafael school or by showing up at San Rafael High School between 8 and 8:45 a.m. Saturday. The program itself begins at 8:45.

The cost is $2 per person or $3 per family, and child care is available.

More information is available by calling the county schools office at 456-0150.